DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 135 572 RC 009 737

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TITLE	Community Problems in Eight Northwestern Counties. Report No. 1 of a Series on Quality of Life and Development in Northwestern Wisconsin, January 1976.
INSTITUTION	Wisconsin Univ., Madison, Univ. Extension. Dept. of Rural Sociology.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Bethesda, Md.
REPORT NO	WUEX-CD-1
PUB DATE	Jan 76
GRANT	NIMH-R01-MH25266-01
NOTE	17p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Community Cooperation; *Community Problems; Comparative Analysis; Crime; *Economic Factors; Employment Opportunities; *Environmental Influences; Medical Services; Pollution; Recreation; *Rural Areas; Schools; *Social Services; State Surveys; Surveys; Taxes; Transportation
IDENTIFIERS	*Quality of Life; *Wisconsin

ABSTRACT

As part of a study of the quality of life in northwestern Wisconsin, questions re: important problems, public services, and environmental concerns were asked of a sample of 150 people in each of 5 counties (Bayfield, Douglas, Price, Taylor, and Washburn) in 1974. Responses to similar questions asked in a 1973 study of Ashland, Burnett, and Rusk Counties and in a 1974 statewide survey were used for comparisons. Responses to the three areas of concern were categorized as: (1) most important community problems (national economy, local economy, taxes, lack of public services, disorder, lack of cooperation, environment); (2) public services (job opportunities, public schools, public libraries, fire protection, water supply, medical services, crime prevention/control, police relations, neighborhood safety at night, streets/roads, public transportation, stores/retail services, indoor and nearby recreation); (3) environmental concerns (stream, lake, and/or air pollution; soil erosion; wildlife reduction; litter; crowded recreation areas; noise; people living too close). Comparative analysis revealed: the overriding concern was economic; the magnitude of economic problems had increased during 1974; the general perception of specific environmental problems was stronger than in 1973; public service problems were in the areas of transportation, medical care, retail services, and indoor recreation. (JC)

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ED135572

DEPARTMENT OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Staff Paper Series in Rural and Community Development

COMMUNITY PROBLEMS IN EIGHT NORTHWESTERN COUNTIES

by

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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REPORT NO. 1 OF A SERIES ON

QUALITY OF LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHWESTERN WISCONSIN

January, 1976

R009737

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PROGRAMS
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EXTENSION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research upon which this report is based was supported by the Research Division of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and National Institute of Mental Health Grant # ROl MH25266-01. The research was conducted under the supervision of Professor Eugene A. Wilkening, Department of Rural Sociology, with the assistance of graduate students Oscar B. Martinson, David McGranahan, Charles Geisler, Virginia Lambert and Gary Linn. The Wisconsin Survey Research Laboratory was responsible for the sampling and data collection. The report has been prepared and published witb the collaboration of Professor Donald E. Johnson, Extension Specialist in Rural Sociology.

Report No. 1: QUALITY OF LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHWESTERN WISCONSIN

COMMUNITY PROBLEMS IN EIGHT NORTHWESTERN WISCONSIN COUNTIES

(Prepared by Virginia Lambert)

The purpose of this report is to present a picture of what the residents of northwestern Wisconsin see as the major problems of their communities. Questions concerning important problems, public services, and environmental concerns were asked of a sample of people in five counties (Bayfield, Douglas, Price, Taylor and Washburn). The survey was conducted in late 1974, with approximately 150 people included from each county. Responses to similar questions asked in a 1973 study in Ashland, Burnett and Rusk Counties, and in a 1974 state-wide survey, are included as a basis for comparison.

Important Problems

Respondents were asked, "What is the most important problem facing the people of this community?", and, "What is the second most important problem?" The answers, by county, were combined into the nine categories shown in Table 1. The first part of the table shows the responses for the most important problem, and the second gives the answers to both questions combined.

Economic problems stand out as the primary concern in all five counties, and the overall importance of the economy has increased considerably since 1973. However, in the Lake Superior counties of Douglas and Bayfield, economic problems attributable to local conditions (e.g., a lack of jobs, lack of industry and growth, etc.) are seen as much more important than economic problems which are of national scope (inflation,

high prices, low farm prices, etc.). The high priority given to the economy in Douglas and Bayfield is consistent with that found in neighboring Ashland the preceding year.

In Price, Taylor, and Washburn, national economic problems take precedence over those of the local economy, although the differences between the two types of problems are not large. The economic concern in Taylor is primarily low farm prices.

A lack of public services is second in importance to economic problems. This includes lack of particular services as well as to deficient public services in general. With the exception of Price County, where this problem is exceptionally important, there has been little change overall since 1973. Lack of services is cited least often in Douglas, the most urban of the five counties.

The most deficient service in Price County is medical facilities and doctors, although a substantial number of people also mention lack of an adequate sewage system. Other types of services referred to often are poor roads in Bayfield and Douglas, recreational facilities for youth in Taylor and Washburn, and public transportation in Washburn.

Problems of social disorder (crime, vandalism, drugs, traffic, alcoholism, misuse of welfare, spiritual problems, etc.), and a lack of cooperation (lack of communication, political problems, etc.) are cited less often and to about the same extent in all counties. The percentages are comparable to those found in 1973. However, problems of disorder are mentioned as among the two most important problems more often in Douglas County than in the others, with the emphasis falling on crime, vandalism, and drugs. This may be a reflection of the urban character of the northern part of the county.

An improvement in public services usually means an increase in taxes. Taxes are noted as a major problem less often than in 1973, but are still mentioned by 11 percent of the Douglas residents as one of the two most important problems. A comparison of responses by place of residence shows that taxes are most problematical for people in large cities.

A surprising finding in comparing these results to those of the 1973 study is the decrease in the percentage of people who refer to environmental problems. Only in Douglas, and to some extent in Bayfield do these problems appear at all important, probably in part as a result of publicity surrounding pollution of Lake Superior. It seems that the increase in economic problems since 1973, has over-shadowed environmental problems as among the two primary concerns of the residents. It is also interesting to note, along this same line, the overall decrease since 1973, in the number of people who say that there are "no problems" in their communities.

Rating of Services

In order to get a clearer idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the public services structure in the counties, respondents were asked to rate particular services in their areas as "very good", "fairly good", "both good and bad", "not very good", or "not good at all". The percentages of people in each county saying that a service is "very good" or "fairly good are shown in Table 2. If less than half said a service is good, it is underlined. People who did not know about a particular program were not included in the calculations of percentages. This is a relatively small group except in the case of "library and bookmobile services", where about a third of the sample in each county was excluded.

TABLE 1

THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMUNITY PROBLEM CITED by RESPONDENTS

	1974 SURVEY					1973 SURVEY		
	Bayfield	Douglas	Price	Taylor	Washburn	Ashland	Burnett	Rusk
National Economy*	15%	17%	23%	23%	29%			
Local Economy	31	34	17	21	20	43	27	29
Taxes	3	3	3	1	3	16	4	8
Lack Public Services	22	15	33	22	23	15	29	20
Disorder	4	8	4	6	5	4	8	8
Lack Cooperation	4	7	8	7	6	4	8	4
Environment	3	5	1	1	0	4	12	0
Other/Don't Know	17	10	10	18	8	5	10	12
No Problems	1	1	1	1	6	9	2	19
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS (each person scored twice)

National Economy*	27	26	33	34	39			
Local Economy	42	47	34	27	28	56	35	34
Taxes	8	11	6	2	5	21	6	11
Lack Public Services	41	37	61	45	42	38	43	28
Disorder	8	18	11	8	7	13	12	14
Lack Cooperation	10	12	12	12	11	5	12	8
Environment	5	7	2	1	1	8	26	1
Other/Don't Know	17	24	12	28	9	13	22	23
No Problems	42	18	29	43	58	45	42	77
TOTAL	200	200	200	200	200	199	196	196

*National and local economic problems not tabulated separately in the 1973 study.

The predominance of economic problems is again evident in the low ratings given to job opportunities in all counties. Less than a fourth of the people say the job market is good, everywhere except in Taylor County. The somewhat higher rating there may be due to the large percentage of agricultural employment (37 percent), and to the active recruitment of new industry in the towns. Overall, the job rating has gone down slightly since 1973. This decline is particularly evident along Lake Superior as shown in the comparison of Ashland to Bayfield and Douglas.

In terms of specific services, the public schools, library and bookmobile facilities, fire protection, and water supply for household use are scored high in all the counties. The schools in Douglas, and the libraries in Price (and in Burnett in the 1973 study) are rated somewhat lower than elsewhere. The general rating on schools in this region is consistent with that for the whole state.

Except for Washburn County, the rating of medical services (doctors, hospitals, emergency treatment, etc.) is lower in this region than for the state as a whole. The concern with lack of medical services in Price County is reiterated here in the exceptionally low rating. Medical services also are scored lower than most other services in Douglas. In Price and Taylor health care is rated as worse by those living in the villages and rural areas than in the cities. The reverse is true in Douglas.

Although most of the people in the region think that crime prevention and control is good, the rating here is lower than for most other services, especially in Douglas, Price and Taylor, where it is lower than for the state as a whole. In all of the counties except Douglas, the ratings of crime control by rural residents are considerably lower

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE RATING LOCAL SERVICES ARE "VERY GOOD" OR "FAIRLY GOOD", BY COUNTY*

	1974 SURVEY					1973 PILOT SURVEY			1974 State Wide Survey
	Bayfield	Douglas	Price	Taylor	Washburn	Ashland	Burnett	Rusk	
Job Opportunities	15	13	25	36	15	21	17	26	NA
Public Schools	79	69	74	83	75	80	79	80	80
Public Library & Bookmobile	92	93	66	87	87	92	67	85	NA
Fire Protection	78	86	87	85	80	88	72	94	NA
Water Supply for Household Use	94	90	95	92	93	90	80	91	NA
Medical Services	73	49	32	59	81	NA	NA	NA	76
Crime Prevention & Control	70	59	56	60	69	66	74	69	70
Relations Between People & Police	82	68	64	62	74	77	81	80	NA
Neighborhood Safety at Night	88	75	85	91	89	NA	NA	NA	NA
Streets and Roads	55	51	54	57	70	39	51	45	56
Public Transportation	16	20	31	42	36	NA	NA	NA	NA
Stores & Retail Services	62	66	52	64	60	NA	NA	NA	75
Indoor Recreation	20	49	54	39	33	52	44	61	68
Nearby Places for Recreation and Sports	54	70	63	72	61	NA	NA	NA	NA

*Percentages computed after excluding those who said they had no knowledge about the service. Percentages less than 50 percent are underlined. Questions not asked in 1973 and in the State-wide study indicated by "NA".

than those given in the cities and villages. These findings may reflect the statewide increase in rural crime.

In contrast to the concern with crime prevention and control, neighborhood safety at night is uniformly rated as good, with Douglas County only, showing a somewhat lower score. Relations between the people and the police are better in Bayfield and Washburn than in the other counties, although the ratings in all are relatively high.

A major problem for these counties is transportation services. While the streets and roads are generally rated about the same as for the state as a whole, they are scored lower than most other services. Roads are rated more favorably in Washburn than elsewhere.

Public transportation is lacking in all the counties. Comparing the responses by place of residence of the respondent shows that public transportation is rated lowest by the residents of villages and rural nonfarm areas. While urban public transportation systems have been encouraged recently as a result of the energy crisis, intercity public transportation has gradually been cut back. Residents of villages and rural areas, who often must travel long distances for work, recreation, or shopping appear to feel this loss most acutely.

As with medical services, stores and retail services, and facilities for indoor recreation are given low ratings in the northwest compared to the state as a whole. Indoor recreation is scored especially low in Bayfield, but also in Taylor and Washburn. The village residents in Bayfield and Washburn, where there are no cities, are very dissatisfied with recreational opportunities. (In Bayfield, 85 percent of village residents say indoor recreation is not very good or not good at all;

in Washburn, 73 percent responded this way.) In the other three counties people in cities give a lower rating than those in the villages. Less than 40 percent of the village residents in Douglas, Price and Taylor say indoor recreation is not good.

Outdoor recreational facilities are better overall than those for indoor recreation, but in Bayfield, the rating is still low compared to other services in the county.

Environmental Problems

Although environmental problems appear as a low priority among the most important community problems, a more complete picture of the extent to which residents of these counties are concerned about the environment is given by addressing these problems directly. For nine environmental problem areas, people were asked to rate how serious the problems are locally--"very serious, somewhat serious, only a small problem, or no problem at all". The percentages of people in each county saying that the problem is very or somewhat serious are shown in Table 3.

Water pollution, especially lake pollution, is generally the most serious. In Douglas County, over 80 percent of the people feel that lake pollution is more than a small problem. The people there apparently are convinced that taconite dumpings present a health hazard. Residents of Bayfield are also concerned about pollution in Lake Superior. In Burnett and Washburn, the rapid build-up of summer lake homes has brought local lake pollution problems. While people in Ashland seem relatively unconcerned about lake pollution, this may be in part because the taconite problem was only made public towards the end of the 1973 survey.

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE REPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AS "VERY" OR "SOMEWHAT SERIOUS", BY COUNTY *

	1974 SURVEY					1973 SURVEY			1974 STATE-WIDE SURVEY
	Bayfield	Douglas	Price	Taylor	Washburn	Ashland	Burnett	Rusk	
Stream Pollution	32	66	26	23	29	21	51	45	68[a]
Lake Pollution	61	82	32	21	40	29	57	31	
Soil Erosion	40	49	9	9	13	16	8	10	NA
Wildlife Reduction	58	50	53	41	34	44	21	31	NA
Litter	23	45	21	18	36	26	35	20	29
Crowded Recreation Areas	8	25	17	12	15	5	25	7	19
Air Pollution	8	33	18	7	7	5	2	1	42
Noise	5	12	3	2	9	NA	NA	NA	22
People Living Too Close	8	39	9	5	10	1	8	5	15

*Percentages computed after excluding those who said they had no knowledge.

[a]In the state survey, people were asked about "stream and lake" pollution in one question. Other questions not asked in the 1973 pilot study and in the state-wide survey indicated by "NA".

While concern for water pollution is high in the northwestern counties, it is generally lower than in the state as a whole. Over 68 percent of the respondents in the state-wide survey felt lake and stream pollution to be more than a small problem.

Wildlife reduction, littering, and, in Bayfield and Douglas, where the red clay soil erodes easily, soil erosion are other major environmental concerns. In general, Douglas stands out in terms of all types of pollution. The greater emphasis there on crowded recreational areas, air pollution, noise, and people living too close together, is probably a reflection of urban problems, since 72 percent of the sample in Douglas was drawn from the City of Superior. In comparing the 1974 with the 1973 results, there is, if anything a greater concern for specific environmental problems in the more recent survey.

Conclusion

The overriding concern in northwestern Wisconsin is economic. For some the problems are viewed primarily as lack of jobs and/or wages, while for others they are viewed as national such as inflation, and low farm prices. The magnitude of economic problems has increased during the past year. People are more likely to see the economy as among the two most important problems they face. While environmental concerns have moved out of first place in the minds of many people, the general perception of specific environmental problems is stronger than in 1973 - residents see these problems as more serious, but economic problems are most dominant at the time of the 1974 survey.

The chronic problem of deficient public services in rural areas also is reflected in the region. Although most services are considered to be

adequate by the majority of the residents, problems are evident in the areas of transportation, medical care, retail services and indoor recreation. These services are poorer here than elsewhere in the state, and they are rated lower than other services within the northwestern counties.